23: Benedict
184, 192, 582, 591, 602, 611, 613, 614, 616, 618, 621

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/For lists of kinship terms, and for excellent and detailed information concerning correlations between kinship terminology, patterns of behavior, and social institutions, see category 601./

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
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IX

POLITICS

The Karens never seemed to be able to develop any permanent political organization beyond that of village life. Once in a while a strong man would emerge and gain power over a number of villages and combine them under his own personality. But as a rule the personal independence of the individual would assert itself and with the death of the organizer there would be no one to take his place and the several villages would return to their independence, under each local chief.

In the village the leadership would usually be in the hands of some man who would assert himself over the others and he would pass on his position to his children, to a son not necessarily the eldest, or a nephew, but the one who by his personal ability would be best fitted to take up the task. Often some rival individual would covet the power in the hands of the headman and his family, and set himself up as leader. He would gather a few who were willing to submit to him and would go off and build a new village of his own, and a rival dynasty, if such it could be called, would be set up.

The power that the chief or headman of the village exercised was not carefully defined. There were usually a few old men who were considered as having influence because of their connection with the golden past. The chief governed with the consent of these. As a rule matters were discussed in open gatherings and the headman followed the general desires of the elders. In case of marked differences, there would be a split-off and a new village would be formed: only those remaining loyal to

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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888 in which all wisdom and culture were supposed to have been revealed. The older the man, provided he had not begun to show too evident signs of decay, the wiser and more worthy of reverence he was thought to be. These old men repeated to the younger generation the "sayings of the elders" that had descended to them from former

[291]

BRINGING WATER FOR THE VISITOR, NABAIN VILLAGE, THARRAWADDY DISTRICT

generations. They were consulted on all occasions, and their advice was usually followed.

622 Above the elders was the village chief ("th'kaw" or "s'kaw"). He was actually the chief man in the village. His position was

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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usually heriditary, but he might have no son or nephew to succeed him. In that case the elders chose one of their own number as his successor. In so far as the villagers obeyed any authority at all, they obeyed him.[1] They generally observed his commands, although he possessed no well-defined jurisdiction. Ordinary quarrels, disputes relating to land, questions concerning the ownership of animals, etc., were referred to him for settlement. In most instances his court was a free and informal meeting of villagers and elders; and his decision, incorporating the opinion of the latter, would have the sanction of the group and be accepted by the parties concerned. He was the patriarch of the village, and often its high priest as well. A foray would not be undertaken without his consent. He was accorded the place of honor in the family living-room, which was usually the mat on the side facing eastward. If his rule became extremely displeasing to the villagers, they quietly went to a different site from that chosen by him at the time of the annual migration of the village. Thus, he would be left with only those who remained loyal to him, usually his relatives. The other families were now free to select a new chief or headman.

The chief levied no taxes. He tilled his field like his fellow villagers. He often received gifts of choice game, fruit, or grain; but these were largely a tribute to his personal popularity. If the village was about to engage in a raid, he might assess the people for the purpose of fitting out the expedition; but this would bring him no direct personal benefit, unless he was the organizer of it himself. The Karen had no caste of chiefs, no royal family, or even a privileged social class. Every member of the community shared alike in the ordinary tasks and the privations or prosperity of the seasons.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Wealth formed the only basis of social distinctions in the village life. But this made little difference in outward conditions. The land was free and belonged to the community. Every man was at liberty to take for his own use as many acres of hillside as he could fell. On this score there was little chance for inequality. However, the accumulation of money, which in the early days was represented by silver ingots, later by rupees, enabled one to purchase buffaloes or cattle or even an elephant, although the last was more often caught than bought. The ownership of a bronze drum brought more distinction to a family than that of seven elephants.

[1] [i.e. the chief -- analyst.]

19; Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1923 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

the folk by which the traditions and customs were handed down from generation to generation. Among the Bwe, who seem to have esteemed priests more than the other tribes, there were four of these prophets who presided over the great sacrifice, the eldest being regarded as high priest. When one of them died, the elders assembled and chose which of his sons should inherit the office. Then, earrings, a headband, richly ornamented clothing, and a silver-mounted sword were secretly prepared for the ceremony of installation. A delegation of the elders took these gifts to the house of the chosen one, an elder going ahead to ascertain that he was at home. The party, being assured of his presence, surrounded the house to prevent his escape, which he must feign attempt. The presents were then cast before him. If he really desired to escape, he must do so before the house was surrounded.

In case the elders did not find the chosen successor at home, they laid in wait for him either by the path approaching the house or within the house itself. Sometimes an elder climbed up under the roof, hid himself until the man returned, and then dropped the gifts at his feet. The appurtenances of the priestly office, having been presented, could not be refused.[14] In some instances a "wi" was also a chief, serving thus as a leader in the tribe and in its magic. In any case he was a most important personage and was held in awe by the people.[15] Only a few of these men now remain.

The healing offerings dealt with in the second and third sections of this chapter fall generally within the province of the village elders, or are often performed by the members of the family of the sick person, for almost everybody knows more or less how to make the offerings, though this is not so true at the present time as it was a generation ago.

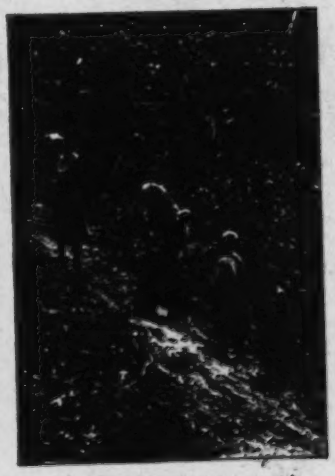
[14] Bunker, *Soo Tha*, pp. 64, ff.

[15] For the "wi's" connection with magic, see p. 275.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7

333. KARENS BRINGING ELEPHANTS TO MARKET

"a spirit of equality, and governed by the moral influence of its natural heads alone." (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I., p. 407.) The chief of these elders is called *Sawkè*; he gives his name to the village. The faults of the Karéns are their dirt, their addiction to drink, and a degree of superstition so extreme that a motherless infant is refused adoption for fear of turning the wrath of a vengeful demon upon the foster-mother. In epidemics of cholera and small-pox the Karéns abandon their villages in panic fear. The Karéns are shorter but of stouter build than the Burmans and Talaings, and of much fairer complexion. But their name of "white" Karén is derived from their clothing. Very characteristic is their short upper arm. Young people of splendid physique may be seen; but the conditions of life are so hard, and malaria is so prevalent in the forests, that the population remains stationary—by the census of 1891, 633,600. The toilsome Karén finds lightness of heart in the liquor he brews, a remarkable contrast to the vivacious and abstinent Burman. The contrast is borne out in the dreary wail of the Karén music and the bright and exuberant cadences of the Burmese. Karén children grow independent very young (No. 355), and begin their heavy outdoor labour soon. Early physical exertion possibly accounts for the second moral quality noted above. The hill-cultivation is greatly at the mercy of the seasons, from burning-time in April to harvest in October. The hardship is aggravated by a superstition of divination-bones (*Kyeyyo*) which often tabooes the most eligible sites. Scarcely have the crops been garnered than the clearing of a fresh site for the village begins.



334. KARENS GOING OUT TO WORK.